

Reviewed by
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Private police—are they a massive resource for crime prevention, as one government study found, or, as George O'Toole contends in "The Private Sector," an ominous reflection of the breakdown of law and order and a threat to individual liberties?

In the last decade, more attention has been paid to these questions than ever before. Spurred on by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, first the Rand Corp., then the National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals studied the private detectives, security guards, private patrolmen and others who make up the private police.

What their studies show is cause for attention and concern. The private security industry employs over

a million people—about as many as does public law enforcement. It is a multibillion dollar business, currently growing at the rate of 10 to 12 percent a year.

Often armed, and generally believed to have some or all the authority of police officers, the private police are all too often woefully unqualified for such responsibility. In one survey, it was found that 56 percent had not completed high school, and 37 percent had felony or misdemeanor arrest records. To make matters worse, their training in ballistics and the laws of arrest, search and seizure is "either minimal or nonexistent," according to the National Task Force on Private Security, which has called for substantial improvements in this area.

Against this background, it is not surprising that George O'Toole decided to write "The Private Sector." The subject is full of scandal, political and social overtones, and amusing details which makes it ripe for journalistic harvest.

In his survey of private security

Private Police Business

and related topics, O'Toole leaves little doubt that there are worse abuses committed by what he calls the "police-industrial complex" than either of the government-sponsored studies of the area seems to recognize. In contrast to the relatively uncontroversial "establishment" observations, O'Toole charges that the "private sector" works too closely with the least legitimate parts of public law enforcement. The result, we are told, is the prospect of a "shadow army of a half-million private cops," "an informal and invisible nexus linking both public and private police outside officially regulated channels. It can become *de facto* a national police force."

As he considers wiretapping, dossier-keeping, ideological burglaries, political spying, and *sub rosa* networks of law enforcement personnel, O'Toole concludes repeatedly that many of the private sector's worst

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THE PRIVATE SECTOR: *Private Spies, Rent-a-Cops, and the Police Industrial Complex.* By George O'Toole.

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excesses come in the service of public law enforcement.

If proven, these charges would certainly make this an important book. But instead of proof, O'Toole contents himself with sensational charges, innuendo and occasionally reckless assertions — and his treatment of private security is a disappointment. Because it is not reliable, it is, in essence, a very unimportant book about a very important topic.

Typical of O'Toole's style is his frequent use of rhetorical questions or the phrase "it is only reasonable to

assume" where proof of his conclusions is lacking. And he is sometimes given to sensationalism. He claims that "secret societies" and "Old Boy Networks" of private investigators and police agents represent a serious threat to our privacy. In support of this theory, O'Toole focuses his attention and scorn on an organization called Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit (LEIU). He calls it a "quasi-secret police intelligence organization," and claims that "almost no one has ever heard of it." It is baffling that such a claim would be made in light of the mention of LEIU in police journals, popular magazines, and books including "The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society" and "State Secrets." Additionally, the California legislature, the U.S. Senate and the National Task Force on Organized Crime have all heard testimony or commented on the existence of LEIU.

Despite these failings, the book shows the human side of the private police industry in pleasant, anecdotal and often interesting detail. The author's histories of Pinkerton, Burns and

Wackenhut—the big three of the private security business—are facile and fun, as is the discussion of the routines of four private detectives.

Those wanting a more measured, reliable treatment of the topic might well read "Private Police in the United States," by James Kaklik and Sorrel Wildhorn. Impersonal but thorough and erudite this summary of the Rand Corp. findings examines the problems in the private security industry, and offers extensive suggestions for their resolution.

While O'Toole may be accused of seeing a conspiratorial private police agent under every bed, he has raised issues that make it look like the conservative authors of "Private Police" have been caught napping—and as thorough a study as theirs should certainly have considered O'Toole's issues, if only to conclude that they are atypical. So one must choose between the dull and the spectacular, vaguely sensing that there is probably much important truth somewhere in-between.

That book, regrettably, is yet to be written.